

For the Love and Care of the Woman

Preface

Does woman need to be a subject of ceaseless controversy and debate? Thousands of years ago, back in Indian history, the **Manusmṛti**, the Grand Law Book of India recorded that **women were created for the generation of humanity** [*Prajanārthaṃ striyah sṛṣṭāh*]. It was argued therefore that she was entitled to equal justice with man [*Tasmād sādharmaṇah dharmah saha patnyā udīritah*. Manusmṛti IX. 96 = Therefore an equal **dharmā**, to be shared with the wife, has been laid down].

We also know that in early Vedic India the woman was entitled to attend to the **gārhya-patya** [i.e. the domestic sacrificial fire] in the absence of her husband from the home. But she was not to remain there long and enjoy that justifiably owned position. It was soon widely made known to people that it was unpleasant to the gods to see women at the sacrifices. She could not on her own make offerings to the gods [*Nāsti strīnām pṛthag yajnah Na vrataṃ nāpyupōīathaṃ*. Manu V.153]. There was no religiousness for woman, apart from humiliating subservience to her husband, which could do her any good [*patim mīmṛīate yena tena svasge mahīyate*. Ibid.].

Buddhism ceaselessly challenged these religious inroads to social attitudes and approaches. Gender difference is not to stand in the way of women in religion or society. *Itthibhāvo no kiṃ kayirā* / **What will our being women matter?** The Buddhist nun **Somā roared back in this manner** at a heckling Mara. Spiritual profundity of nuns like **Dhammadinnā** and **Vajirā** should remain undiminishing sources of inspiration to women anywhere in the world.

Know ye the culture of your past - your achievements and the heights you have reached. In these essays, I have endeavoured to give you an insight into them. With your vision clear and aware of the goal you wish to achieve **Go ye**

forward and **retrace not your steps** - *Mā nivattha. Abhikkama.*

May the generous contributors to this *dhamma-dāna*, living and dead, receive their blissful rewards.

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We feel we would be failing in our obligation to the lay community if we do not include in this collection of **Studies on Women in Buddhism** a special one we make on the Angulimāla Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya [MN.III. 97-105]. Long before the initiation of worldwide movements like Women's Liberation and Feminist Activists, the Buddha appears to have felt the need to pay serious respect to the role the woman plays as mother of children. This was, of course, more than twenty-five centuries ago and was introduced to mankind in the eastern theatre of the world, namely India.

To assign to the woman the dignified role of mother comes from a much more-to-be respected conservationist attitude that the Buddha adopted about a total growth [i.e. physical, moral and intellectual] of humanity. The concept of mother [*mātā*], in an age of pre-test-tube babies, looms large in Buddhist thinking. *Mātā mittam sake ghare* = **The mother is the friend in one's own home** says the Samyutta Nikaya [SN.I.37]. The woman, as the growing up young girl in the home, is guarded with serious concern as the future wife and would-be mother. She must be fit and qualified enough to stand up to the count down before being launched into the challenging role of multi-purpose womanhood. Whichever be the century we live in or the millennium we have moved into, these roles cannot be, with any degree of sanity in our heads, be underrated or underestimated. The

Buddhists are not oriented to labour too much to accommodate unmarried mothers or fatherless children. These are believed to be lapses which are to be conscientiously guarded against. They rightly visualise the dangers and deficiencies of single-parent homes.

This respect for motherhood in a civilized social set-up has directed Buddhist thinking to prepare for preliminaries of maternity care. Physical ease and comfort of a pregnant would-be mother and her clinical mental grooming for motherhood are very much part and parcel of a well-run household with generous and well-meaning in-laws. Sri Lanka of more than fifty sixty years ago knew of many miniature domestic ceremonies of the white magic type which were quietly carried out in the home for the security and well-being of expectant mothers. The morn to evening day-time ceremony of *Maṭi-ata-perīma*, *Ata-gaha-metirīma* or *Ambakola-atten-metirīma* were delightful rituals carried out in our village homes on the advent of the arrival into the family of new-born babies. Everyone of us in the home, the young and the old, made our contribution towards it by carrying messages to the master of the ritual in his own home [not through calls on the mobile telephone], by gathering from the nearby woods the fruits and leaves needed for the creation of the associated artifacts. They included ant-hill clay for moulding the sun-disc, tender coconut leaves for numerous types of decorations, creepers like *hīressa* and leaves of the *tolabo* lily plant, perhaps to be used as mock weapons of offence and defence of various divinities associated with the ritual.

Besides these, there is also maternity care coming to the Sri Lankan Buddhists via religious considerations. In the category of Buddhist *parittas*, we have the Angulimala Sutta [MN. III. 97 - 105] referred to above, the use of which for this purpose appears to date back to the time of the Buddha himself. This sutta tells that Angulimala, the erstwhile bandit, after his ordination as a disciple under the Buddha, reported to him of a woman whom he had seen during his alms round, suffering severe pains owing to her pregnancy. Seeing Angulimala's

anguish and concern, the Buddha admonished him to go to that woman in pain and to wish her well and pray for the safety of her unborn babe through the asseveration of his personal purity. Angulimala immediately pointed out to the Buddha his pre-ordination crimes and the Buddha promptly advised him to make the asseveration from the time of his admission to the noble order [*ariyāya jātiyā jāto*]. Angulimala acted accordingly and she is said to have been immediately relieved [*Atha kho sotthi itthiyā ahosi sotthi gabbhassa*. op. cit. p. 103]. It is undoubtedly the spiritual prowess of Angulimala that did it. All that happened is described as *sotthi itthiyā ahosi* = To the woman there was security and well-being. There is not a word about the delivery of the baby.

It appears that in the years that followed, this incident has been simulated in its entirety. In the manner of other *paritta* recitals where the monks in congregation emphatically assert the power of the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha [as in the Ratana Sutta], and thereby invoke blessings on those in need of them, in the case of Angulimala *paritta* too, the monks in congregation appear to repeat the words of Angulimala which are no more than a record of his own spiritual prowess, and invoke blessings thereby on the pregnant mother and her unborn babe. However, in the Angulimala *paritta* as recited today we discover ten additional lines as a preface to what Angulimala himself recited under the direction of the Buddha.

It immediately discloses the manner in which the Angulimala *paritta* appears to have developed itself to a high-powered pregnancy [or we should say more precisely **child-delivery**] *paritta*. Those ten lines in translation are as follows.

Whosoever shall recite this *paritta*, the seat on which he sits,
 The water with which it is washed shall eliminate all labour pains.
 With ease shall there be delivery, that very moment it shall be done.
 This *paritta* which the Lord-of-the-World had given unto Angulimala,
 Is one of great majesty which shall keep its efficacy for a whole eon.
 That *paritta* we shall now chant.

The growth of this legendary process is witnessed in the Commentary to the Angulimāla Sutta [MA.III.337]. The Commentary elaborates it in this manner. Angulimāla learnt this asseveration procedure or *saccakiriya* from the Buddha and went to the woman to provide her comfort and security. As males were not allowed within the labour room, the monk was accommodated behind a curtain from where he did his chant. That very moment the woman is said to have delivered her baby with perfect ease.

In recognition of the very great efficacy of this sutta, a seat is said to have been constructed at the place where the monk did the chant. This seat is believed to have acquired such a reputation for its power and potency for easy delivery of offspring, it is said that even animals with difficulty of delivery benefit by being placed on it. In the case of feeble ones who cannot make the journey there, the water with which the seat is washed is to be applied on their head. This enables easy delivery. Even other diseases are said to be cured thereby [*Yā dubbalā hoti na sakkā ānetuṃ tassā pīṭhaka-dhovana-udakaṃ netvā sīse siṅcanti taṃ khaṇaṃ yeva gabbha-vuṭṭhānam hoti. Aṭṭaṃ pi rogaṃ vūpasameti. Yāvakkappā tiṭṭhanaka-pātihāriyaṃ kit ' etaṃ . MA.III. 338*]. Thus in Sri Lanka, the Angulimāla *paritta* today has changed its rightful place in being a pre-natal child-and-mother care chant, to one of easy delivery in the labour room. The role of chant-water has reached its highest ascendancy.

This same Buddhist concern for pre-natal maternity care of both the mother and the unborn child [which would be deemed a basic and fundamental humanitarian concern] is seen to exist in the Mahayana countries of the Far East like China and Japan as far back as the 8th century A.D. With the profusion and proliferation of *Bodhisattvas* in the Mahayana to serve in specialised capacities, it is not surprising to discover one like Koyasu Kwan-non [Kwan-non of Easy Deliverance], a lady-like Goddess of Mercy, holding a child in her hands. Alice Getty thinks she ' was unquestionably brought to Japan from Northern India via

Central Asia and China'. She also further says: ' We know from reliable texts that in the eighth century there existed a Kan-non cult in Japan, and that the Kan-non was called Koyasu or the Kan-non who brings about Easy Deliverance '. [Alice Getty - Gods of Northern Buddhism, p. 96 f.].

For purpose of comparison with the obviously earlier genesis of the **mother-care** concept in the Angulimala Sutta, we reproduce here a statement from Alice Getty's Gods of Northern Buddhism.

In the *Bukkyo Daiji-ten* is the following legend: The Empress Komyo (710-760), being with child, invoked the Shinto goddess Amaterasu, and prayed that she might have an easy deliverance. One night she saw in a dream the Bodhisattva Avalokiteṣvara standing at her bedside, and when she awoke she found a small image of the Bodhisattva lying beside her. She kept it preciously until after her deliverance, and then ordred it to be placed inside a statue of the 'thousand-armed Avalokiteṣvara which she had enshrined in the Taisan-ji [Temple of Easy Deliverance] in Kyoto. According to popular belief, the Empress Komyo founded the Taisan-ji and dedicated it to the Koyasu Kwan-non, and it has remained up to this day one of the most flourishing centres of devotion in Japan. [p. 97]

With due deference to the traditions of both the Theravada and the Mahayana on this subject, we therefore wish to add to this collection of **Studies of the Woman in Buddhism** the text of the Angulimala, indicating what the original canonical version was and how it was used as **a simple pre-natal mother-and-child protective chant** [*sotthi te hotu sotthi gabbhassa*] as well as its apparently more developed Easy Delivery concept [*sotthinā gabbha-vuṭṭhānam yaṭ ca sādheti tam khaṇe*], with its **Pregnancy Care** parallel in Koyasu Kwan-non of Japan. We are more inclined to popularise what we consider to be the earlier canonical tradition of **pre-natal care of the mother and the child** [*sotthi te hotu sotthi gabbhassa*] which can quite harmlessly begin from the earliest indications of pregnancy, thus building up confidence and comfort in the mind of the would-

be-mother. That kind of religious solace, the presence of comforting religious grace of the *tisaraṇa* must necessarily come to all areas of life in society, well before the outburst of crisis situations. This would eliminate the not very honourable last minute rush to wayside-shrine-divinities for guard and protection through the local *bāra-hāra* type of supplication.



Angulimāla Parittaṃ

[Paritta as recited today]

Preface:

*Parittaṃ yaṃ bhaṇantassa nisinnaṭṭhāna-dhovanaṃ
udakam ' pi vināsesi sabbam eva parissayaṃ.
sotthinā gabbha-vuṭṭhānaṃ yaṭ ca sādheti taṃ khaṇe
therassa ' ṅgulimālassa lokanāthena bhāsitaṃ
kappaṭṭhāyi-mahātejaṃ parittaṃ taṃ bhaṇāmahe.*

Translation:

Whosoever shall recite this *paritta*, the seat on which he sits,
The water with which it is washed shall eliminate all labour pains.
With ease shall there be delivery, that very moment it shall be done.
This *paritta* which the Lord-of-the World had given unto Angulimala,
That *paritta* we shall now chant.

Text:

*Yato ' haṃ bhagini ariyāya jātiyā jāto
nābhijānāmi sañcicca pāṇaṃ jīvitā voropetā.
Tena saccena sotthi te hotu*

sotthi gabbhassā ' ti.

Translation:

O, Sister, from the moment I entered this noble life of a recluse,
I reckon not having deprived any living thing of its life.
By the truth of this, may there be happiness and well-being
To you and to your unborn babe.

Note:

The original text with which the Buddha is said to have commissioned Thera Angulimala to go to the woman in pregnancy discomfort and make an asseveration [*sacca-kiriya*] to relieve her of her agony consists only of the eighteen words given above, beginning with ***Yato 'ham. bhagini*** and ending with ***sotthi gabbhassa***. [See MN. III. 102 and MA. III.337 f.]. These alone tell us of Thera Angulimala's post-arahant spiritual prowess whereby he was able to provide comfort [*sotthi*] to the woman in pain. The ideas expressed in the apparently later composed preface reduces the force of the directly communicated power of the *sacca-kiriya* and brings it down to the level of a water-powered ritual.

We suggest that all those closely connected with a pregnant mother, like the husband, the mother and the mother-in-law, all lovingly chant this *paritta* to her whenever they can, morning and evening, no matter how early or late she is in her pregnancy. This invariably introduces even to the unborn child the feeling of love and care which is so much needed at this stage of pre-natal human growth. May this loving attitude of love, share and care spread island wide in Sri Lanka.